

Teaching (*and learning*) Generosity

Do You Have Enough?

By Karen Ehman

“Then he said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.’” Luke 12:15 (NIV)

“On your mark. Get set. Go!!” my husband shouted as our three kids began the M&M race.

The rules were simple. Each child had a bowl in a separate corner of the family room. In the middle of the floor sat a huge bowl of M&M’s. The kids were to transport their candies one tablespoon at a time back to their individual bowls. If any dropped on the floor, they couldn’t pick them up.

The most important rule was this: when the timer rang, they had to stop in place. If the kids weren’t sitting in their corner holding their bowl, all their M&M’s would be forfeited.

The clincher? We wouldn’t tell them how long the timer would be set.

Four-year-old Spencer, the family clown, giggled as he dashed back and forth, candies flying off his spoon. He kept going, thinking he would get the most by hurrying and scurrying.

Methodical Mitchell was slow and careful so he could balance more candies on the spoon, not drop any and fill his bowl to the brim. But he forgot about the timer.

Big sister Kenna quickly clued in to the “catch” of the game. She too was careful transporting her M&M’s. But after a few trips, she sat down with bowl in lap and waited.

Moments later the timer went off. Spencer dove for his bowl. Mitchell, who was meticulously scooping, realized all of his tedious effort had come to nothing. Both boys were without a single M&M.

In her corner sat their sister, now the proud owner of everyone’s candies. One boy began to complain, the other to cry. They wanted their candy! We had them calm down to listen as we finished the Bible lesson. There was a point to this shenanigan.

My husband read the story of the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21. This man had a prosperous farm that earned him quite a deal of money. Instead of using his wealth to bless others, he tore down his barns and built bigger ones to stash his stuff.

However, that very night, life’s timer would go off and he would die. All of his earthly possessions would be of no value to him. In fact, they would be left for others. We related this story to our family game that day.

You know, when I step back and look around, it’s easy to see how I can seek excessive earthly treasures too. I spend money on things I don’t need instead of giving to feed the poor or reaching out to people with the good news of Christ. Clothes, out-on-the-town outings, or money spent on luxuries for ourselves can fill our home and heart. I’m not only talking about really expensive items or trips. It can be as simple as a pair of sandals on sale.

Even though three pairs of sandals sit in my closet that are in good condition, I can justify spending \$15 on new ones. They're cute, match my favorite blue shirt and are half price! And I sure do want to get to the store early so my size is still there.

Do I really need them? No. Do I want them? Yes. And here's where I have to do some soul searching and re-read the story of the greedy farmer from Luke 12:15. In it, we're warned, "Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'"

Am I hoarding my money for an abundance of possessions? Could I limit myself by setting a budget for splurges (like those sandals) and spend the money I save on needful things?

While there is merit in saving for a rainy day, we should also share that which God has given us. This is exactly what our daughter did that day with her M&M's and her two baby brothers!

Dear Lord, show me where I can spend less on myself and more on others. All I have belongs to You. May I use it for Your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.



10 Ideas to Teach Your Kids {& You!} Generosity

1. Tell stories. Hearing stories from the past help to paint a picture of the joy and the results of giving. We often tell our children of the times, when we were first married and having kids, that our money was so tight we often didn't know how we were going to cover bills. Then, it never failed that someone left us groceries anonymously on our porch or we were sent a check in the mail from someone who said we were on their mind. Telling these stories to our kids helps them to catch a vision for being generous too.

2. Record the stories. {This makes number one easier!} During those early years we kept an "I Spy" journal—as in "I Spy The Lord Providing For Us". When our kids were old enough to read for themselves, they could pick it up and be reminded of God's goodness and the generosity of others.

3. Send them on a listening mission. Have them be on the lookout at church, school, in the neighborhood, etc... for who might benefit from a little cash. It never fails that they will hear that a parent lost their job or that a kid wants to go to the football camp but can't afford it. Have them report back to you to see if there is a way your family can help.

4. Be all sneaky-like. Brainstorm with your kids ways to help others while remaining anonymous. We've colored pictures and mailed them along with gift cards to grocery or department stores to families in need. We've paid for registration for camps and seminars and then sent a note telling the families so {without telling them who!}. Being both generous and sneaky is a blast!

5. Give them money to give away. Sometimes give your kids ten dollars {or a hundred if you are able!} with the one stipulation that they must give the money away. No, not to their friend to spend on an Xbox game they'll play with them. Have them pray about who might need the money more than them. Then, let them give it to them!

6. Serve. As a family, serve at a local charity. We take our kids sometimes to a shelter for battered women. We help prepare and then serve them their evening meal. Then, while the moms are having an after-dinner Bible study, we watch their sweet kiddos. {WARNING! This one results in your kids wanting to smuggle home other sweet kids to be a part of your family. Gently remind them that the kids there are not to take home!} We've also served Thanksgiving meals at a homeless shelter before returning home to eat our own. And for emphasis, we made the kids skip breakfast so they were extra hungry while serving. It helped to drive home the lesson that day. They were hungry while others got to eat. That is exactly how those homeless folks feel most days! (Note: our kids have no medical conditions that make skipping a meal a concern)

7. Send them away. Do what it takes to have your kids go on a missions trip. They will never be the same! I went on my first trip in college to Mexico. I used to feel very "less than" when it came to my family's financial status. I shopped at Kmart for the blue light specials. Many of my friends shopped at much classier places. They also drove nicer cars and had newer and bigger homes. When I spent three weeks working to build a church for a poor congregation in Mexico, I saw for the first time what "poor" actually is! I came home feeling like a queen shopping at Kmart. Our own kids have all been on trips. Our daughter on too many to mention. Our 18 year-old son just went with his dad and a group from our church with Samaritans Purse to help clean up from hurricane Sandy. Our 15-year-old son went on an inner-city missions trip with youth group to Milwaukee. (He was then one who wanted to smuggle home an adorable toddler named Ollie!)

8. Roam the streets. Take your kids on an afternoon of performing random acts of kindness for strangers. Pay for someone's order behind you in the drive-thru line. Take some flavored iced tea in cans and hand them out to the crossing guard at the corner, a department store worker out gathering carts in the parking lot on a steamy hot day, or the road commission workers on the highway during construction (Hey—you'll be driving super slow during that construction zone anyway. Just have your kids hand them out the window! It helps you to smile rather than get all grumpy because of the construction zone slow-down!) In the winter, buy hot cocoas from a drive thru and give them away to all of the Salvation Army bell-ringers you can find standing out in the cold.

9. Stay home and bless your servants. Think you don't have any servants? Yes you do! How about the mail carrier, the UPS guy (or gal), the garbage collector or power-line workers out in front of your house? They serve you so you can live life. How about a plate of homemade brownies for those garbage collectors? Give your UPS worker a cold can of soda. Hang a bag of homemade granola trail mix on the mailbox with a note thanking your mail carrier for serving you all year. Be sure to get your kids in on the act. Our son Mitchell LOVED doing this when he was little. He enjoyed watching men working using their "busy machines" (the power-line workers on their cherry-pickers). He knew if he took them out treats, they'd let him sit and watch them work. (From a safe distance of course.) **HINT:** Keep frozen balls of homemade cookie dough in your fridge so you can whip up a fresh-baked treat at the drop of a hat.

10. Teach your kids whose money it is anyway. All our belongings belong to God. All our money does too! Teach them by example to tithe (the Bible's practice of giving 10% of your money for the work of the Lord) and even to give beyond. It has been a joy to see our grown daughter giving money off the top of her paycheck from her salon to missionaries she supports. I spied a sticky note our 18-year old had on his desk the other day listing out what he was doing with his paychecks. It included his car payment, cash in the savings, "Fun" money and also his tithe. More is caught than taught. Don't just tell your kids to be generous. Show them by example that all we have belongs to God. The LEAST we can do is give Him back 10%!

You can read more by Karen Ehman at karenehman.com

After reading this article, please give us your feedback. [CLICK HERE.](#)